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The PRESIDENT: Mr. Stevens has very forcefully brought out the factor that a book may be in bringing into life dormant faculties that might otherwise go to waste and recalls to us the remark of Prof. Dewey, that the loss of the unearned increment is as nothing compared with the loss of the undiscovered resource.

Of course you know as well as the members of the program committee that they had nothing to do with the selection of the next speaker; the topic chose her. How could anyone else be asked to present the subject of "The woman on the farm," than Miss LUTIE E. STEARNS, of the Wisconsin free library commission?

THE WOMAN ON THE FARM

Modern programs of library extension through public libraries as distinguished from traveling library systems are practically confined to an arbitrary line drawn tightly around the city's limits. Charters, laws, or ordinances under which many libraries operate are usually interpreted to restrict the use of such institutions to a narrow area and no great attempt has been made through legislation, save in California and a few isolated examples elsewhere, to extend library privileges to adjacent communities. It is a happy omen for the future that the president of the American Library Association, the custodian of a library catering to two-million city dwellers with a circulation second in rank to Greater New York, should have seen fit on his own initiative to place among the topics of this meeting the needs of the woman on the farm, the real founder of the city's citizenship.

"Who's the greatest woman in history?" was the query debated by Kansas school teachers recently. They considered Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth, Semiramis, Cleopatra, Cornelia, Catherine of Russia, Maria Theresa, Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale, Susan B. Anthony, and half a hundred others. When they came to deciding, all the names known to fame were ruled out. And to whom do you suppose the

judges awarded the palm? Here is the answer: "The wife of the farmer of moderate means who does her own cooking, washing, ironing and sewing, brings up a family of boys and girls to be useful members of society and finds time for intellectual improvement."

These teachers knew that woman, they knew the drudgery she faced at four or five o'clock every morning the year 'round. There are twenty millions of her in this country of ours, she makes up nearly one-fourth of the population of the country, and while we are dealing with these most "vital statistics," we may include the tragic fact that sixty-six per cent of those committed to insane hospitals are from rural districts, the farm women constituting the great majority thereof.

And yet the needs of this great, deserving class of "humans" with minds and hearts even more receptive to ideas than are city women—the needs of such as these are as yet almost wholly unrealized by librarians aside from Commission workers. No committee of the American Library Association has ever had the joy of working out a program of library extension from the great city systems to rural readers. The question put by the then President Roosevelt to his Country Life Commission, "How can the life of the farm family be made less solitary, fuller of opportunity, freer from drudgery, more comfortable, happier, and more attractive?" still awaits solution from the library standpoint.

Though agriculture is our oldest and by far our largest and most important industry, it has only recently occurred to us in the United States that we had a rural problem. It is only within the last decade or so that we have awakened to the fact that there is a rural as well as an urban problem, and the library world is too prone to keep from recognizing it. We are not concerned in this connection with the problem of the retired farmer who moves into a town to spend his last days which are, seemingly, all he is willing to spend; nor shall we discuss those restless

flat dwellers in our cities who, tempted by such alluring and wholly immoral titles as "The Fat of the Land," "The Earth Bountiful," "A Self-Supporting Home," "Three Acres and a Cow," or "Three Acres and Liberty"—"for those to whom the idea of liberty is more inspiring than that of the cow"—attempt to start ginseng, guinea pig, pheasant, and peacock farms, and who return to the city as shorn of guineas as the pigs they leave behind them.

In the serious solution of this problem, we may, in truth, differ as to the sort of farmers we would benefit. As Sir Horace Plunkett has said in his "Rural problem in America," "The New York City idea is probably that of a Long Island home where one might see on Sunday, weather permitting, the horny-handed son of week-day toil in Wall Street, rustically attired, inspecting his Jersey cows and aristocratic fowls. These supply a select circle in New York City with butter and eggs at a price which leaves nothing to be desired unless it be some information as to cost of production. Full justice is done to the new country life when the Farmers' Club of New York fulfills its chief function—the annual dinner at Delmonico's. Then Agriculture is extolled in fine Virgilian style, the Hudson villa and the Newport cottage being permitted to divide the honors of the rural revival with the Long Island home. "But to my bucolic intelligence," concludes Sir Horace, "it would seem that against the back-to-the-land movement of Saturday afternoon, the captious critic might set the rural exodus of Monday morning."

To the New England librarian there probably comes the picture of rugged, beancad hills with "electrics" in every valley eager to take the intellectual rustics to the Lowell lectures or the Boston Symphony Orchestra. That books are appreciated in the rural districts even in a state that boasts a library in every town is shown by a letter from one who had received the volumes sent out by the "Massachusetts Society to Encourage Studies at Home." "I do not know where I should stop if I tried to tell how much these li-

brary books have helped me in my isolated life—I have craved so much and there seemed no access possible to anything I wanted. I have lived always with a longing for something different; life was a burden to be carried cheerfully, yet I never quite conquered the feeling that the burden was heavy. Books have taken away that feeling and before I was aware, the load was gone. I have written thus of myself, not because my individual experience is of importance enough to interest anyone, but because I believe the world is full of people with the same wants that I have and it may be some satisfaction to know how fully you are supplying them."

To the librarian of New Jersey, the isolated dwellers of the salt marshes would come to mind. Maryland suggests to some librarian epicures the oyster farm, with its succulent product, but to others comes the vision of the "real thing" supplied as in Washington County with the ideal arrangement of central library, branches, deposit stations, traveling libraries, and automobile delivery to the very doors of the Maryland farm homes—the most ideal arrangement of rural extension that exists in America today.

To the Georgian, the "cracker" presents itself with its "Uneeda" book appeal. The "mountain-white" of Kentucky, who comes to Berea in his seventeenth year to learn his letters, would surely appreciate an opportunity to go on with them when he gets "back home." In the north middle west, where farms are still surrounded by a fringe of pine and an "infinite destiny," a farmer's wife writes as follows: "For many years I have lived on a farm on the cleared land of Northern Wisconsin, and I have made an earnest study of the conditions that surround the lives of the average isolated farmer and his family. I have seen all of the loneliness and desolation of their lives, I have witnessed all the dreariness and poverty of their homes. I have been with them when our nearest railroad station meant a twenty-eight mile trip through bottomless mud or over shaking corduroy; where our nearest post-office

was eighteen miles away, over the same impassable roads and where we were often without mail for weeks at a time; when the nearest public library was sixty miles away; when the only element of culture or progress we possessed was the little backwoods school, housed in a tumble-down log shack and presided over by careless or incompetent teachers. I have watched civilization come to us step by step,—the railroad, the rural mail delivery, the country telephone, and other modern rural conveniences. But, before any of these, right into the midst of our lonely backwoods life, came the traveling library, for it is characteristic of the traveling library that it is not dependent on modern conveniences for its appearance. I can recall the thrill of joy with which we received our first case of books. I read their titles over and over, handled and caressed them in a perfectly absurd manner. Almost all of the books were old friends of mine; but, to our little neighborhood of foreigners, they were “brand new” and the enthusiasm over that library knew no bounds.

“We had a regular literary revival that winter. We talked books in season and out of season; and from talking about the books in the little library we fell to talking of other books; of books we had read in our younger, happier days. It mattered little if in the course of these conversations books and authors were hopelessly mixed.

“I cannot say that we derived any great amount of knowledge from our first library, but I do know that it brought into our little backwoods settlement, that which we needed much more—hope and courage and an interest in life. That was my first introduction to the traveling library, but during the years that have gone since then, I have seen much of the work of these little cases of books. While it is true that the traveling library does not always meet with as enthusiastic a reception as our little settlement gave it that winter, yet it always comes to our rural communities as a help and inspiration. My

appreciation of the worth of the traveling library has grown with the years.”

“Once a library meant nothing but rows of books and its influence was confined to narrow limits. However with the establishment of the traveling library, these books have become veritable missionaries penetrating to all sorts of dreary, isolated places, carrying with them a culture and a pleasure that will aid in illuminating the long, dreary path of existence with the color of happiness.”

As one farmer's wife has it in another locality, “Good books drive away neighborhood discussion of the four deadly D's—Diseases, Dress, Descendants and Domesticities.”

Olive Schreiner in her wonderful and heart searching study of “Woman and Labor,” has pointed out that at first woman hunted with the man, and later when the race settled in one spot, the woman was the tiller of the soil and the man the hunter and warrior. Then when man no longer needed to hunt or fight, the woman moved within the house and the man tilled the fields. The woman became the isolated one. Isolation is the menace of farm life just as congestion is of city life. This isolation has a depressing effect upon the intellectual life of those who require the stimulus of contact with others to keep their minds active. The woman on the farm, as Mr. Bailey has pointed out, is apt to become a fatalist. Floods, drought, storms, tornadoes, untimely frosts, backward seasons, blight, predatory beasts, animal and plant diseases render a season's great labor of no avail, or destroy the fruits of it within the hour. Along with these perennial discouragements comes the interminable round of getting up before sunrise and cooking, baking, dishwashing, sewing, mending, washing and ironing clothes from day to day, week to week, month to month, and year to year, with additional work peculiar to the seasons, such as at planting times, threshing and harvesting, fruit gathering and preserving, etc., etc., etc. The work of the farm is carried on in direct connection with the

home, thus differing from nearly all the large industries, such as manufacturing and the like. The fact that agriculture is still a family industry where the work and home life are not separated, differentiates it from life in the city with its lack of a common business interest among all the members of the family. This condition tends to make rural life stable. The whole family stay at home evenings and one book is read aloud to the entire family circle. We still find the big family in the country where bridge whist and race-suicide—cause and effect—are as yet unknown. But the big family puts cares and responsibilities upon the mother on the farm and when one sees the “bent form, the tired carriage, the warped fingers and the thin, wrinkled features” of so many farmer’s wives, one does not at first see anything but cruelty to animals in urging recreation and reading upon such over-burdened women. But a brighter, industrial day is at hand. From perpetual motion to hours of reasonable industrial requirements the daily working period of the farmer is coming to be reduced by labor saving machinery. The modern gasoline engine, to my mind the most important contribution to civilization and culture in recent times, now pumps the water, saws and cuts the wood, runs the lighting plant, the washing machine, the milking machine, the cream separator, the churn, the sewing machine, the bread-mixer, the vacuum cleaner, the lawn mower, the coffee grinder, the ice cream freezer and even the egg-beater. These, with the fireless cooker, have relieved the housewife and made time for reading and other recreation. Good roads, rural free delivery, the interurban trolley car, the automobile and the rural telephone are removing the old-time isolation and are making possible enjoyment and a culture and refinement equal to that of the business and professional classes of the cities. One thing only is still withheld from distinctly rural communities—the opportunity to get good books.

It has been said so often it has become a truism that the rural districts are the

seed bed from which the cities are stocked with people. Upon the character of this stock more than upon anything else does the greatness of a nation and the quality of its civilization ultimately depend. The importance of doing something with and for these people is paramount for the farms furnish the cities not alone with material products but with men and women. Census returns indicate that cities are gaining on the country all the time. We who wish to stop the rural exodus must co-operate with other agencies to make farm life more attractive and this we can do by opening our doors to farmers and their wives, the makers of men. It is our city’s self-protection that there should come from the farms strong, well-educated minds, and we each should contribute our share to this end. A Chinese philosopher has said, “The well-being of a people is like a tree; agriculture is its root, manufacturing and commerce are its branches and its life; if the root is injured, the leaves fall, the branches break away and the tree dies.” State universities and other free educational agencies are recognizing the fact that not the few but all, farm and city-bred alike, must be educated for life and through life. Commencement day is no longer the educational day of judgment for the individual. Rural consolidated high schools are being built to supplement the little red school-house. Libraries, through extension of their service, must aid in the great agrarian movement of the day. We cannot all, perhaps, have the ideal arrangement as worked out in Maryland by Miss Titcomb. It may not be possible to cover other states with book wagons as Delaware proposes to do. We may not accomplish the California ideal of the county as the unit. We may not be able to send traveling libraries on their beneficent mission, but we each may try to let down the bars at our own reservoirs so that whosoever is athirst may come and drink of the waters of life freely.

The PRESIDENT: Whenever I become rash enough to venture a comment upon any paper of Miss Stearns I always take